

## Little Orphan Annie and Sandy by MissMudblood

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**Summary:**

Deep down Jim Hopper knew that giving his surrogate daughter a television would come back to bite him in the ass. Really, he knew. But what was he supposed to do- leave her there with nothing to do all day? So he had brought in the TV and shown her how to flip through the channels. It started off great, and she even learned some things. But then she watched Annie.

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She watched *As the World Turns* every day, and she'd eagerly relay the details of the most current episode every night during their dinners. It had helped her string together sentences of greater length, even if she sometimes struggled with pronunciation. She even loved *Family Feud* and was surprised at all of the answers they gave to questions she didn't always understand. Sometimes she'd ask him to explain ("What does 'garment' mean?" or "What happens in basketball?") but other times she'd just silently and intently watch the contestants' faces as they gleefully shouted their responses.

But then she saw *Annie* on one of the movie channels one evening and Hopper didn't have an inkling of what he was in for. He expected her to love Annie because of the mirrors to Eleven's own life-growing up without a home or loving parents, feeling like an outsider, suddenly being thrust into a world she didn't fully grasp just yet. Or even the similarities between their curly locks. But nope, none of those things are what did it for Eleven.

"Can we get a dog like Sandy?" she asked innocently one morning as they were eating breakfast. Hopper had made scrambled eggs and bacon, and even though it was no Eggos, Eleven scarfed it down all the same. Hopper put his fork down, sighing as he thought over his best options.

"Dogs bark, kid. And they also need to go outside for walks and bathroom breaks. We still need to lay low, remember?" he said evenly.

Her face slumped, and she picked at her eggs without looking at him. She didn't say anything else, but he could see the disappointment plain as day. He felt that familiar pang of guilt in his gut, but he

wasn't sure how to fix it. Getting a dog was just out of the question. At least until it was safe. It had been five days since she closed the gate, and he could still see the dark circles under her eyes from exhaustion. They made her look all the more pitiful as he cleared away their breakfast plate in silence.

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There was no more talk of dogs in the next week, and he thought that had been the end of it. Then he was in the middle of pouring his third cup of coffee one Thursday morning when he heard the door bell jingle as it swung open. He turned around to see if it was his newest deputy returning from that traffic accident on 4th Street when instead he saw the freckled face of the Wheeler kid. He had a poorly-wrapped present under his right arm as he hesitantly waved at Hopper with his left. Hopper sighed and gestured for Mike to follow him into his office.

"What are you doing here, Wheeler?" he tried not to let the exasperation seep into his voice, but it was fruitless.

He held out the present, red and silver wrapping paper messily wrapped around a box topped with a green bow. "I have this for El," he paused, placing the box on Hopper's desk and sliding it towards him. "It's a present."

"It's a little early for Christmas, don't you think?" He took it anyway.

"It was the only wrapping paper we had at home," the kid said sheepishly, a faint pink flushing his cheeks.

He cocked an eyebrow at Mike, "It's not something that's going to get her in trouble, is it?"

Mike narrowed his eyes defiantly. "Of course not, I wouldn't do that. I want to keep her safe as much as you do."

Hopper sat back in his chair, arms crossed. "Good, because this tentative visitation we've got going could end at any time."

Mike's eyes got even narrower and he looked like he was about to say something, but he must have thought better of it because he sat back

a few moments later, deflated. Hopper knew that despite how angry Mike still was at him, he wouldn't push his luck for fear that Hopper really would stop letting Mike visit the cabin. Hopper already thought he was being very generous by agreeing to pick up the kid twice a week and let him stay for dinner. He even agreed to let one or two of the other kids come along occasionally as long as they promised to stay inside, stay quiet, and behave. It was a new arrangement after the closing of the gate, but he hadn't had much choice after seeing Eleven's reunion with her friends. He didn't think he could keep them all apart even if he tried.

"If you could just give it to her and tell her I miss her," Mike asked without meeting Hopper's eyes. His cheeks flushed a little darker.

"You just saw her three days ago," Hopper said with a roll of his eyes. Mike didn't respond, so Hopper resigned himself to be the messenger between two lovesick teenagers and nodded. Mike thanked him and shuffled out of his office. He just had to adopt a teenager.

Hopper passed along the gift to a bright-eyed Eleven later that evening, ruffling her hair affectionately as she gingerly carried the present to her room. He forgot to ask what was in the box in favor of starting dinner, and by the time he thought about it again she had already fallen asleep for the night. He quietly crept into her room to turn off her bedside lamp and bring an extra blanket, and when he reached her he saw what must have been her present: a stuffed animal in the shape of a golden retriever. It was snuggled close to her chest, her left arm holding it tightly. Clearly she had not forgotten about her desire for a new family pet. She had a serene smile on her face as she slept, and Hopper crept back out of them room with a smile of his own. Although he'd never admit it, he kind of liked the Wheeler kid.

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For the next several days, talk of the dog situation continued with fervor. Eleven didn't exactly ask for a dog again, but many of her conversations coincidentally involved a dog somehow. Her new stuffed animal, whom she had named Dusty, was carried around the cabin with her no matter the time or activity. When Mike and the other kids came to visit, there was a lot of talk about dogs. Will Byers

shared his experience with his own family dog, and Eleven sat in awe as he talked. It was kind of breaking Hopper's heart, if he was honest.

"I might be a little late getting home tomorrow," Hopper told Eleven after she had hugged Mike goodbye (and it was definitely only a hug because his eyes could pierce daggers if he wanted them to and the kid knew he owned a firearm) and she was starting to settle into the couch to watch a rerun of Gilligan's Island. Dusty the dog was sitting in the crook of her elbow.

"Why?" she asked. She had gotten better about patiently awaiting his return without constantly watching the clock ever since she closed the gate. She rarely asked him when he would be getting home anymore, content to read the new books Lucas and Will had brought her or watch the slew of VHS tapes Dustin had given her.

"Just some shopping to get done," he said vaguely. She nodded and went back to her show, thinking nothing else of it. Hopper finished the dishes from dinner and found her asleep on the couch by the time he had returned from the kitchen.

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Hopper knocked on the door hesitantly the next evening, one hand behind his back. Hearing the characteristic knock, Eleven opened the door without moving from her spot on her bed. She was engrossed in a comic book she had received from Mike a week ago, barely registering that Hopper was looking at her expectantly as he took off his holster and badge. After a good thirty seconds of nothing, he cleared his throat.

He held out the baggie, one wriggling goldfish in tow. "It's no puppy, but it's better than nothing, right?" he asked, suddenly second-guessing himself. Maybe this was dumb after all.

His sudden fear was squelched as quickly as it appeared as she reached out, lifting the bag up in front of her face to look at the little fish as it swam from one end of the plastic bag to the other. Her eyes were wide and her face had split into a bright smile.

He walked back into the kitchen to pull out the small tank he'd

gotten, along with a tin of fish food and a book on how to care for fish. She was still looking at the little fish in awe.

“You’re going to have to take good care of him, feed him, clean his tank, all that good stuff. Then once it’s safe, we can talk about getting a dog.”

Eleven had been in his life for over a year, but he had never seen her look so childish before now. She always looked mature beyond her age, after experiencing all she had. There was a steeliness in her eyes, a strength he couldn’t quite explain. But he hadn’t ever seen her look her actual age before now. She placed the fish carefully on her nightstand next to Dusty before throwing her arms around him. He felt a weight lifted from him as he hugged her back.

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Exactly six days after they eventually were able to move out of the cabin and into a real, actual house, Hopper was late coming home again. Only this time he was accompanied by a tiny chocolate lab puppy.

### **Author's Note:**

This is my first foray into writing for *Stranger Things*, but I kind of fell in love. I'm hoping to continue with some one-shots to fill the gaps between Season 2 and the eventual Season 3 since we know there will be around a 7-month time skip. If you have any ideas on what I can jump into next, please let me know in the comments! Thanks so much for reading!